DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 695 CS 004 758

AUTHOR Bernstein, Joanne E.
TITLE Helping Young Children Cope with Separation: A Bibliotherapeutic Approach.
PUB DATE Feb 78
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Parents and Reading Conference (3rd, New York, New York, February 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bibliotherapy; *Childhood Attitudes; *Childrens Literature; *Death; *Divorce; Elementary Education; Instructional Materials; Library Material Selection; Parents; Reading Materials; *Reading Material Selection

ABSTRACT

Adults who wish to help children come to terms with loss from death, divorce, and other separations have a good ally in books. While not a complete cure, bibliotherapy can help children cope with loss by engaging the emotions and freeing them for conscious and productive use. Numerous books have appeared for children to read, enjoy, and use in coping with life's difficulties, offering the following: an opportunity to identify with others; a private environment to rehearse solutions; enhancement of feelings of belonging; information about the stages of mourning; vicarious experience of others' problems; and insight into loss experiences. Specific suggestions for the adult include the following: read the book first for scope, nature, quality, and appropriateness for age, interests, and reading levels; examine one's own attitudes toward loss; arrange for workshop discussions among other adults of the proposed books to determine whether they are fit for home or for library, whether they are morally or religiously offensive, whether they could be read with a class, and whether they are too frightening or graphic. (A list of children's books for use in bibliotherapy for loss is included.) (DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED170695

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN COPE WITH SEPARATION: A BIBLIOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACH

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joanne E. Bernstein

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Dr. Joanne E. Bernstein
Associate Professor
School of Education
Brooklyn College
Brooklyn, New York 11210

CS004758

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN COPE WITH SEPARATION: A BIBLIOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACH

Scott, age five, recently looked on as his father, divorced from his mother, took a job 2,000 miles away from them. Knowing he will see his Dad once a year or less, Scott is moody and explosive in school.

In the same classroom, Lauren is thinking about the grandmother she has just lost to cancer. In the block area, she frequently suggests hospital play.

From the moment we leave the womb until the moment we leave life on earth, whether we will it or not, we are asked to cope with separation and loss. Over the years, we cope with moving, new siblings, changing schools, losing friends, deaths, perhaps divorce, and other separations. Rabbi Earl Grollman, an expert on mourning, has said, "Mental health is not the denial of tragedy but a frank acknowledgment of it. Better to say ... 'I could cry, too,' rather than, 'There, there, you mustn't cry.' " (1967, ix.) At the same time, to adequately help young children cope with loss, adult guides need information and resources.

Concepts of Separation

Children's concepts about all permanent separation are linked to their notions about death, for the bereavement felt in loss situations is similar in kind to the loss suffered after the death of someone close. The difference is one of degree. The way people react upon losing a treasured watch demonstrates this principle. A low feeling, perhaps resembling psychosomatic sickness, may linger for a day or two, reappearing with renewed intensity the next time it is appropriate to wear the watch. This is mild bereavement. After serious losses, somatic symptoms, depression, anger, guilt, and other emotions last much longer, of course.

While more intense and complex, the difference remains primarily of degree, not kind. The way in which individuals cope with separation is tied to their concepts of death.

Ideas about temporary and permanent separation develop slowly, on a par similar to their ideas concerning time. The concept of temporary separation begins with awareness of alternate states of wakefulness and sleeping (Gullo, 1973). Infants begin to see a pattern - they will be alone for a time, then a comforting figure will return. Babies next play with this curious matter, absence and presence. Peek-a-boo and throwing toys from cribs are evidence of children's desires to master this concept. As long as someone will participate in the games, babies do not tire of it.

Soon, noticing that some things never reappear, young investigators take on the concept of permanent separation. How amazing, toddlers reflect, as they fiddle with trash can pedals and toilet flush systems. We give them the words - "all gone." When allowed safe opportunity to examine temporary and permanent separation, youngsters pave the way toward a healthy concept of that most shocking of permanent separations, death.

In research with Hungarian children, Nagy (in Feifel, 1959) revealed that children under five years of age (an approximation) usually do not see death as final and irreversible. Unable to separate death from life, they may view the dead as asleep, on a journey, or as partly alive. Unable to differentiate themselves from the world, in keeping with Piaget's postulation of animism (1951), they evaluate death through egocentric glasses and cannot imagine anything so totally unlike themselves.

Between the ages of five and nine, children see death as a permanent state. In Nagy's study, they were likely to personify death, perhaps making it an angel or an old man who carries off the dead. The existence of death is accepted, but it must be externalized, so that one may escape death's grasp. Children who

hide under the bed after hearing of a death express need for protection from the rampage of death - perhaps it is contagious.

Using the cognitive growth stages of Piaget, Dr. Gerald Koocher recently examined the concepts of children in the United States (1973). His findings agreed with Nagy's, with one interesting twist. In the five-to-nine range, none of the American youngsters mentions either a death "man" or "angel." Instead, they desire to know all they can about procedures regarding survival, death, and burial. Koocher indicates this, too, is protection. Koocher's subjects say perhaps their knowledge will keep them safe. If not, they will go through the experience supported by preparation, background, and skill.

Finally, at about age nine, children acknowledge that death is permanent and natural, governed by universal laws from which one cannot escape. While the concepts of children nine and over parallel those of adults, their emotional reactions to permanent separation are not those of adults.

Reactions of Young People to Separation and Loss

Investigators have found that reactions to loss involve a range of emotions that are reported time and again. However, it is not a matter for concern if children don't respond in the usual order of things. Of essence after a major loss is that there is some change in habits or response - that youngsters do not ignore the impact.

The immediate shock of acute grief is accompanied by bodily symptoms, such as fatigue accompanied by inability to sleep or lack of appetite. Sudden physiological changes can be explained, so children will realize they are normal.

Childhood mourning has been described by Gilbert Kliman (1968). The first step is testing and accepting the reality. Todd absent-mindedly sets a place at dinner, painfully meeting the irreversibility of his loss - his mother is not coming home. Lisa sets up an imaginary bargain: If I never argue with Mommy, Daddy will come back. The bargain is proven false.

Separation is often followed by justifiable anger. "What did we need this new baby for? Let's give it back to the hospital!" Children may resent others who haven't experienced the same loss. Scott deliberately picked a fight with his best friend, because he could no longer bear visiting a house with two parents.

Anger may also be directed at self, in the form of guilt. "I was so fresh. I hoped he would die." Not easily accepting the intervention of bad luck or fate, unable to fully imagine events without cause, and unconvinced that unpleasant words or thoughts bear no weight, youngsters often reason that they are the cause. If depressed and drained, it is difficult for them to realize they are not alone in their emptiness, and it may intensify. Children may also view separation, be it moving, illness, desertion, or death, as manifestation of an adult's wish to abandon.

It is natural that youngsters who confront a loss should fear further loss. If a school year has been marked by one teacher leaving after another, can security be found? If the natural parents gave up their child for adoption, might the adoptive parents decide to follow suit? Underlying most of these fears is the basic question, "Who will take care of me?"

Children are curious about death and other separations, not shying away until taught that sad aspects of life, particularly death, are viewed by many adults as improper subjects for discussion and investigation. In efforts to come to terms with pain, children's dramatic play may reflect loss themes. Other youngsters have great interest in looking at and touching dead birds, animals, and insects. Such play, instead of being morbid preoccupation, is a way to master the concept of permanent separation.

It is common for youngsters to feel sad after a loss - to cry and let it out. But children's sadness is often not like that of those more mature. They may feel deeply unhappy but then quickly

return to industrious, joyous pursuits. CAlled the "short-sadness span" by Dr. Martha Wolfenstein, it is often a source of shock and consternation to adults who observe seeming lack of feeling without understanding. The child becomes preoccupied with normal living only because the sadness is so huge that it would be overwhelming and intolerable to continue to experience it (1965). In the words of one child in the Wolfenstein study group, "They would cry for a month and not forget it." (p. 239)

If, however, there appears to be no reaction after loss, it constitutes a danger signal for the family and others. Those who suffer in silence plant seeds for future, continued pain. Without expression of grief, it remains, possibly into adulthood. Then it may appear as nagging, inexplicable depression, or fear of abandonment may present itself as inability to sustain a love relationship. Coming to grips with the inevitability of loss and expressing reactions to those losses enable human beings to survive them and become fully available to risk going on with the joys of living.

Helping Young Children Cope With Separation

Children who look toward adults for guidance deserve honesty without euphemism or unnecessary complication. If told a dead uncle went to sleep, many youngsters fear sleep. On smaller scale, if parents make a babysitting separation into a trauma by sneaking away, fear also results.

Youngsters need help as they go through mourning. In the first stage (Kliman, 1968), accepting the reality of loss, children need to feel the hollowness. The willingness of adults to discuss instances in which they have been stabbed with pain will enable children to bring feelings out in the open.

The second stage is the working over and decathectization of memories related to the loss. Mark wants to look at photos of his cousin now in prison. Andrea wants to hear stories about times shared with a grandmother who now lives far away. In sharing memories with children, adults state that it is permissible to talk about loss.

The third stage, according to Kliman, involves cultivating substitute object relationships. A child who has lost a mother may gravitate to a particular aunt at family functions or enjoys warm rapport with a teacher.

Bibliotherapy: A Means for Helping Children

Adult guides who wish to help children come to terms with loss have a good ally in books. The door of the library at Thebes bore the inscription "healing place of the soul."

Dr. Caroline Shrodes, a pioneer in the field, states that bibliotherapy involves interaction "between the personality of the reader and imaginative literature," going on to state it may "engage his emotions and free them for conscious and productive use." (in Moody and Limper, 1971, p. 7) Karl Menninger points to "designating carefully selected books on mental hygiene for therapeutic purposes." (in Schultheis, 1972, p. 6) The Random House and Webster-Merriam dictionaries agree (1969, 1966) that bibliotherapy does not offer a complete solution to any problem, implying additional professional or nonprofessional input in addition to book selection. Caroline Shrodes also has warned that reading, "like other human behavior, is a function of the total personality. When we read fiction, ... no less than when we work, meet people, teach, create, or love, we perceive in accordance with our needs, goals, defenses, and values." (1955)

Many individuals can be helped through reading. One might not necessarily be facing a problem, one might not be in therapy, and one might not be directed to the reading material. Seen as the self-examination and insights gained, bibliotherapy is a process in which most literate persons participate at one time or another. Whether hoped for or unexpected, the insight is utilized to create a richer, healthier life. The salient factors: The author must communicate

in either aesthetic form or discourse with readers; the readers must, in turn, understand and respond, hopefully with conscious awareness, leading to attitudinal and/or behavioral changes.

History and Research

One of the early advocates of bibliotherapy, Dr. Benjamin Rush, recommended novels to mental patients as early as 1812. John Minson Galt II seems to have been the first American to write about the benefits of literature in treating the mentally ill, his best-known work being an essay, "On Reading, Recreation, and Amusements for the Insane," published in 1853. One of the first to use the word Bibliotherapy was Samuel McChord Crothers, in an article in the Atlantic Monthly (1916).

In the 1930s, there was a new interest in the field, which still saw itself aligned formally with mental institutions and medical staff and which viewed books as a pharmacy for the mind. Drs. William and Karl Menninger, utilizing their ideas at their famed Clinic, believed that physicians should assign readings, with the physician approving purchases and responsible for the shape and growth of the library collection. The librarian was a technical member of the team.

In the 1940s and 1950s, additional articles and papers on the subject appeared, examining the psychological validity of the field. Toward the end of this time, Caroline Shrodes and others influenced the field from a philosophical point of view. In the 1960s, on-site research studies grew in number, and bibliotherapy was given major coverage when a full issue of the influential journal Library Trends was devoted to the field (1962). Within it, various practitioners and theoreticians looked toward standardization of practices and philosophical agreement; although work continues toward those ends, arguments continue until this day because bibliotherapy is not a science. Also significant in 1962 was the inclusion of a "Bibliotherapy Clearinghouse" in the Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries Quarterly, a column which still exists.

Field studies concerning children include the following:

In 1961, Webster managed to diminish fear of the dark and fear of dogs in first graders. Reading stories which demonstrated the positive side of the feared phenomenon, and following up with discussion, interviews three months after the stories were completed indicated that of thirty-five children fearful of the dark, twenty-nine were less fearful, and all five children afraid of dogs were less frightened. It is not known, however, if change in attitude was accompanied by changes in behavior.

Researchers have found that attitudes toward groups can be altered by reading. The effect of reading material upon second graders concerning attitudes toward blacks has been investigated by Jackson (1944). Attitudes toward Eskimos have been investigated in a bibliotherapeutic framework by Tauron (1967), who worked with third graders; American Indians was the group considered by Fisher, working with fifth graders (1965). All three believed that attitudinal changes could be effected toward other minorities as well, reporting changes of significance in their studies. When minority characters were given favorable presentation, readers were likely to respond in a positive direction; when portrayed in unfavorable light, the attitudes of readers were negative. The findings reflect paper-and-pencil tests or students' stated opinions but, once again, do not reflect subsequent behavior. Suggested, however, is identification with literary characters.

Bibliotherapeutic practices are of essence when evaluating success. Fisher's study utilized three groups, each being treated differently. One group consisted of middle-class whites; the second was lower-class blacks; the third, racially mixed, middle-class youngsters. Within each group, three different procedures took place. In one subgroup, children read stories. In the second, they read stories and discussed them with the classroom teacher. In the third subgroup, there was no story reading. All subgroups took attitude and information tests regarding American Indians. As expected,

reading produced attitudinal changes, but with stories plus discussion, attitude changes were even more significant, leading also to greater information gain on the post-test. Attitude change took place most frequently in the middle-class, racially mixed group; also, the attitudes of blacks showed greater change than those of whites. Once again, it is suggested that identification with minorities yields this result.

Another study emphasizing group discussion after reading is that of Biskin and Hoskisson (1975), in which a group of fourth and fifth graders who talked about moral conflicts encountered by fictional characters gained considerably in moral maturity (using Kohlberg's scale) over those who merely read the stories.

Time spent in discussion was also central in a study conducted by Prouty in which fourth graders read stories and information books about death (1976). Students were helped toward clarifying which book meant most to them and then wrote to the author. Both actions released some feelings and fears regarding the subject.

It is also important to investigate behavioral changes brought about by bibliotherapy. At present, few studies do this effectively. Few also demonstrate the permanence of attitudinal change. As the therapy is, by nature, of short duration, are its salutary effects?

Reading Can Help Children Cope With Separation

In recent years, numerous books about death, divorce, and other separations have become available for young children to read, enjoy, and utilize in coping with many of life's vicissitudes.

Reading offers an opportunity to identify with others. Seeing themselves as aligned with characters, groups, settings, or ideas, children often discover their own problems as they perceive those of others. Reading may actually be better than life, for it allows acceptance from a distance. The emotional impact of separation from the mainstream caused by poverty, portrayed in Pinkwater's WINGMAN serves as an example. Donald's class has collected foods for poor families at Thanksgiving, but Donald is stunned and embarrassed when a basket is given to him. The reaction at home, where pride is an important value: "That night he saw his father cry. He also saw him jump up and down on a turkey, and throw a lot of groceries and cans of

stuff into the garbage. Donald didn't go back to school after Thanksgiving. His father didn't know anything about it." (1975, p. 11)

The privacy of reading is an advantage. If readers wish to rehearse solutions to their dilemmas, they can do so without observation or interference. If they wish to talk about the difficulty, the literary character can create the shield necessary for those unable to address such topics directly.

Reading is also a way to help children realize they are not alone and to enhance their feelings of belonging. When children feel less isolated, they lose some of their embarrassment and guilt about their family situations.

Stages of mourning are readily seen, even in books for younger readers. Kliman's idea of testing and retesting reality takes place in WHERE'S DADDY? THE STORY OF A DIVORCE (Goff, 1969) and NANA UPSTAIRS & NANA DOWNSTAIRS (De Paola, 1973). In the latter, when the protagonist's great-grandmother dies, he denies until he runs to her bedroom to check it out.

The second stage, going over and decathectizing memories can be seen in such books as THE TENTH GOOD THING ABOUT BARNEY (Viorst, 1972) and MY GRANDSON LEW (Zolotow, 1974), in which after four years of silence, a mother and son discuss the boy's grandfather. It ends, "now we will remember him together and neither of us will be so lonely as we would be if we had to remember him alone." (p. 32) Kliman's third stage, the establishment of a substitute object relationship, is to be found in WHEN VIOLET DIED (Kantrowitz, 1973), in which the reproductive capacity of a cat compensates for the finality of death and teaches about the continuity of the life cycle.

Other themes of bereavement offer reassurance in books. The short-sadness span is a part of Margaret Wise Brown's pioneering book, THE DEAD BIRD (copyright reissued, 1965), in which children visit the grave of an animal -- until they forget. The physical symptoms of grief are also portrayed, in such books as EVERETT ANDERSON'S YEAR (Clifton, 1974), a book about a single-parent family, I WANT MAMA (Sharmat, 1974), about hospitalization, and SHAWN GOES TO SCHOOL (Breinburg, 1973).

Reading offers avenues to broadened interests and adventure - opportunity to be something or someone new. Perhaps children will grow to understand the motivations, goals, and feelings of members of another group. An example: Can a parent who lives across the country love his child? The active expression of that love can be seen in A BOOK FOR JODAN (Newfield, 1975).

Children who have never had to cope with loss can imagine it and remember, however vaguely, their literary experiences if a real situation comes about. Books about the smaller separations (moving, new school, sleeping over, etc.) are especially valuable in this way.

Reading about new people and situations can lead to new interests. There can be an expansion of reading habits to include new forms. A child of divorce may first read or hear the short story "Zachary's Divorce (Sitea) and later notice the rest of the anthology FREE TO BE ... YOU AND ME (Hart, et.al., 1974). On a minimal level, the new interest can serve as a means to point children in the direction of thinking about something other than themselves. For many troubled individuals, both children and adults, this is an accomplishment.

Reading can lead to insight. The discharge of repressed emotions is a valuable aspect of a therapy program, indeed of good mental hygiene. Through involvement, readers vicariously experience the difficulties and feelings of characters, leading to catharsis. Catharsis is helpful, but its benefits are usually temporary. When tensions are partly relieved by catharsis, the emotions are freed, however, and this is important for it clears the mind to develop insight. The ability to perceive part of most of whatever can be known of the true nature of an experience is most helpful in evaluating that experience. Without such insight, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see the motivations of oneself and others. In reading about a loss experience, it is possible to relive prior occasions and to assess strengths and weaknesses while aware of common ground held with the literary character.

Beyond insight and other processes of bibliotherapy, an additional, desirable avenue for working through difficulties is the sharing of problems. If children come to realize that characters are imperfect, as they and their relatives are, that it is permissible to be imperfect, and that it is even acceptable to admit imperfections to others, a wonderful point has been reached. Besides the release, listeners are likely to reciprocate. The overall benefit is that other people become less idealized.

This is especially important in relation to the second stage of mourning. In families where death has occurred, there is an unfortunate tendency for the deceased to be remembered as perfect. In contrast, after divorce, the absent parent's weaknesses are often exaggerated and strengths overlooked by the parent who has primary responsibility for the children. In the children's eyes, the absent parent may become something of a villain. The children realize they have inherited a part of the genetic make-up of the person removed by death or divorce. An image of either angel or villain is likely to result in a loss of self-esteem for the youngsters, because humans can never hope to match the behavior of angels, and they do not want to think of themselves as inheriting characteristics of villains. Open discussion based on honest appraisal of the absent person results in greater self-acceptance.

Bibliotherapy can give youngsters language with which to communicate pain. People of many ages suffer in silence sometimes, not realizing help is available. A book can offer ideas and avenues. For example, in MORRIS AND HIS BRAVE LION (Rogers, 1975), after divorce, Morris' father no longer seems able to face his son. Morris turns from despair and sends his father the very stuffed lion father had given son, enclosing a note asking him to bravely attend his birthday party.

Successful Bibliotherapy

The materials of bibliotherapy are known, yet exhaustive studies of its effectiveness have not been undertaken; even if they were, results would be nearly impossible to quantify. It is unwise to look

toward bibliotherapy as cure. It seems therapeutic rather than therapy (Hannigan, 1971). Just as giving children books about the facts of life does not constitute adequate sex education and can actually serve as a way to sidestep obligation, so it is that the offering of books about separation cannot be considered adequate preparation for loss.

Adult guides interested in aiding children therapeutically need not have massive backgrounds in psychodynamics. Instead, teachers, parents, librarians, and others should try to meet other obligations. These include the obligations of knowing how and when to introduce the materials, reading the materials thoroughly before selection, and knowing each child's particular situation.

Timing is important. Books about loss can be included in a school or home library, along with less emotion-provoking material. Doctors can leave such books around their waiting rooms, intermingled with others. The principle is the same as in a public library: The materials are readily available, but the choice is left to the individual. Readers skim before selecting, nonreaders examine pictures for clues to content. Range in tastes is great. The larger the collection, the larger the choices become. Some practitioners of bibliotherapy believe that books should be chosen by adults and given to children. On the other hand, Cianciolo did a study (1965) and concluded that, while in therapy, children preferred selectiing their own books over having them offered by the therapist. By its mere presence in a collection, adults proclaim that it is acceptable and appropriate to deal with loss; they also turn over the self-motivatin central role to youngsters.

While books on loss may be available, it is often a long and patient wait until children are ready to make use of the books. Often, bereaved children will ignore these books and seek out less threatening fare. At the peak of grief, people of all ages may not want to face mirrors of their emotions. One second grader who had been through a series of foster homes was asked if he might be interested in SIDEWALK STORY (Mathis, 1971), a story about eviction. "Is it

like real-life?" he asked. When the reply was yes, he politely said, "No, thank you. I have my own real-life."

The possibility of intensifying difficulties or raising defenses is diminished if adult guessing about timing is eliminated. In refraining from prescribing, a teacher is less likely to offend parents on emotional, moral, or religious grounds. Also, within readers may be tensions which prevent books from influencing their attitudes or behavior. Perhaps a character possesses the very weaknesses hated in self, arousing intense venom toward the literary figure, causing readers to miss any positive resolution of the problem found in the book. If youngsters select on their own, they will not stick with a deeply disturbing book to please an adult.

Guides can facilitate self-selection. Attracting youngsters might mean decorating bulletin boards to include books about loss, giving book talks, or placing copies of such books on library tables, intermingled with other titles. In developing readership, it is additionally helpful to be on the lookout for books in which loss and separation are side issues. Not as likely to frighten the timorous, sometimes these books have deep impact, as characters within literary contexts struggle. Youngsters pluck out the minor themes, seeing them in relation to the more major themes, and also in relation to themselves. In many ways, such books are greater mirrors of life. In actual life, while change and growth are determinants of loss and loss is a continuing theme to be reckoned with, usually one trauma is not the sole theme of one's existence. Thus, adults should keep in mind aspects of life depicted in books besides the loss events. Are <u>all</u> the events authentic, not merely those which depict loss?

The skilled adult understands a long waiting period and is sensitive to definite, overt, clearly stated signs that children are amenable to having books given to them. Under such circumstances, the offering of books is likely to be welcome.

After a book has been read by or with children, in most circumstances

it is advised that the adult be available for discussion. Although children and adults can gain insight from reading alone, openness is a factor as important as the literature itself. However, just as the adult didn't force the children to read the books, so it is that the adult does not intrude with unwanted discussion.

Perhaps most important for youngsters to have the optimal growth experience after reading is that the adult listen. In listening, there is opportunity for the development of trust. Cues that attitudinal change has taken place may be evident. It is possible to react to the individual, receiving inspiration for ways to continue. The adult can take threads of conversation children have begun and develop possibilities for further use of readings, films, role play, and discussion, as well as areas of investigation to be avoided.

Limitations of Bibliotherapy

Before beginning bibliotherapy or selecting a particular book for a collection, the adult guide has several obligations besides good timing and skillful listening. Most obvious is to read the book before selection. Questions must be asked: What is the book's scope and nature? Is it appropriate for the age, interests, and reading levels of the audience? Is the book worthwhile as literature, or merely propaganda? Are all statements within the book accurate? (If not, is the misinformation or objectionable attitude one which can be clarified or corrected? How?) What is the book's emotional impact? its religious/moral viewpoint?

Many people ask: "Should books about death and other losses be included as possible selections for children who have never themselves experienced loss? Shouldn't the young be protected from pain?" Children who have not experienced grief through separation can benefit from exposure to books on these themes. Although young, in today's world it is probable that they have had contact with others in school, the neighborhood, or at home who have had these experiences. Besides declaring loss an acceptable topic, reading books about separation may serve to answer previously unspoken questions, thereby diminishing myths that children who

have suffered may be abnormal and reinforcing the concept that there are many styles of normal living.

Successful bibliotherapy is usually accomplished only if adult guides are genuinely motivated to help and have come to reasonable terms with their own fears, values, and past losses. Unless one can examine one's attitudes, unless one is comfortable with the books' contents, bibliotherapy is not likely to succeed. Children will soon pick up adults' uneasiness or disgust.

One way to grow is to arrange for workshop discussions among adults who have like interests. In a setting respectful of others' responses, reading some of the books proposed for a collection can spark reflecting, questioning, and arguing, as adults confront themselves. As no one book is essential for a collection, there are no right answers; what is comfortable for one person may be improper for another.

Some questions for discussion and individual appraisal:

Is this book really most fit for the home and inappropriate for school or library? Might this book cause more problems than will be solved? Might the book offend on religious or moral grounds? (If so, what should be done?) Could I read this book with a group, such as a class?

Might children who have not encountered the problem be frightened by this book? Should they be protected from insecurity? On the contrary, should those who <u>have</u> the problem be protected from this book? What do I think about graphic sections, as exemplified by passages about rigor mortis or virulent marital fighting?

What social class, professional role, and other value systems have contributed to my outlook regarding this book? How might it be viewed through my readers' eyes?

A bibliotherapeutic approach is but one adjuvant in a larger, ongoing mental health program. It is incumbent upon each of us - adults and children - through as many avenues as possible, to learn about the effects of separation upon us. Indeed, the way in which we handle separation is one indicator of the way in which we handle life.

References

Biskin, D. W., and Hoskisson, K. "An Experimental Test of the Effects of Structured Discussions of Moral Dilemmas Found in Children's Literature on Moral Reasoning." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., 1975.

Cianciolo, P. "Children's Literature Can Affect Coping Behavior." Personnel and Guidance Journal 43(May 1965): 897-903.

Crothers, S. "A Literary Clinic." Atlantic Monthly 118 (Aug. 1916): 291.

Fisher, F. L. "The Influences of Reading and Discussion on the Attitudes of Fifth Graders toward American Indians." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1965.

Grollman, E., ed. Explaining Death to Children. Boston: Beacon, 1967

Gullo, S. "Games Children Play ... When They Are Dying." Medical Dimensions November 1973 : 26-29.

Hannigan, M. "Counseling and Bibliotherapy for the General Reader," in Monroe, M., ed. Reading Guidance and Bibliotherapy in Public Hospital and Institution Libraries. Madison, Wisconsin: Library School, University of Wisconsin, 1971, pp. 45-50.

Jackson, E. P. "Effects of Reading upon Attitudes Toward the Negro Race." Library Quarterly 14 (1944): 47-54.

Kliman, G. Psychological Emergencies of Childhood. New York: Grune and Stratton, 1968.

Koocher, G. "Childhood, Death, and Cognitive Development." Developmental Psychology 9 (1973): pp. 369-375.

Moody, M. and Limper, H. comps. Bibliotherapy: Methods and Materials. Chicago: Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries, American Library Association, 1971,

Nagy, M. "The Child's View of Death." In Feifel, H., ed. The Meaning of Death. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959, pp. 79-98.

Piaget, J. The Child's Conception of the World. London: Kegan Paul, 1951.

Prouty, D. "Read About Death? Not Me!" Language Arts 53 (Sept. 1976): 679-682.

Random House Dictionary. New York: Random House, 1969, p. 145.

Schultheis, M. A Guidebook for Bibliotherapy. Glenview, Illinois: Psychotechnics, 1972.

Shrodes, C, "Bibliotherapy." The Reading Teacher 9 (October 1955):24-29.

Tauron, R. H. "The Influences of Reading on the Attitudes of Third Graders toward Eskimos." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1967.

Webster, J. "Using Books to Reduce Fears of First Grade Children." The Reading Teacher 14 (Jan. 1961): 159-162.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1966, p. 212.

Weimerskirsh, P. "Benjamin Rush and John Milton Galt II, Pioneers

of Bibliotherapy in America." Bulletin of the Medical Library Association . 53 (Oct. 1965): 510-513.

Wolfenstein, M. and Kliman, G., eds. Children and the Death of a President. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965.

Children's Books Which Treat Separation

Adams, Florence. Mushy Eggs. New York: Putnam's, 1973. (ages 4-8)
David tells of his parents' divorce, his mother's working, and life with his babysitter.

Bartoli, Jennifer. Nonna. New York: Harvey, 1975. (4-8)
Children take part in funerary rites and family decisions after their grandmother's death.

Bernstein, Joanne, and Gullo, Stephen. When People Die. New York: Dutton, 1977. (5-9)
A nonfiction book which, through the death of one woman, brings about questions of living, dying, and losing.

Blaine, Marge. The Terrible Thing That Happened at Our House. New York: Parents', 1975. (4-8)
Family life turns upside-down when Mother returns to work.

Breinburg, Petronella. Shawn Goes to School. New York: Crowell, 1973. (3-6)
Shawn is sad when his sister goes to school, but even sadder when he is taken to nursery school.

Brown, Margaret Wise. The Dead Bird. New York: Young Scott, 1965. (4-8)
A funeral for a found bird. A classic in the field.

Caines, Jeannette. Abby. New York: Harper and Row, 1973. (4-8)
Brother-sister squabbling and loving take place in adoptive homes, too.

Child Study Association of America. Families Are Like That! New York: Crowell, 1975. (5-9)
Ten stories, previously printed individually, now reprinted with new illustrations. Topics include separation caused by employment, adoption, unemployment, death, divorce, and foster care.

Clifton, Lucille. Everett Anderson's Year. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974. (4-8)
One of a series, this poetry anthology is about the life of a black child in a single-parent family.

DePaola, Tomie. Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs. New York: Putnam's, 1973. (5-9)
A close relationship among generations is explored - both in life and in death.

Gackenbach, Dick. Do You Love Me? New York: Seabury, 1975. (4-8)
A painful accident teaches a lonely boy that love doesn't imply possession.

Goff, Bett. Where's Daddy? The Story of a Divorce. Boston: Beacon, 1969. (4-9)
Graphic description of divorce and a small girl's rage.

Hart, Carole, and others, eds. Free to Be ... You and Me. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974. (4-10)
Many life styles depicted in story, verse and song.

Hickman, Martha. I'm Moving. Nashville: Abingdon, 1974. (4-8)
A boy reassures himself by announcing what he can take and what must stay behind, e.g., "We'd take my bike but not my sidewalk."

Jordan, June. New Life, New Room. New York: Crowell, 1974. (5-9)
A family expecting its fourth child must take measures to ease crowding.

Kantrowitz, Mildred. When Violet Died. New York: Parents', 1973. (4-8)
A pet bird dies, and its owners reflect upon the life cycle.

Mathis, Sharon Bell. Sidewalk Story. New York: Viking, 1971. (7-10)
Imagination prevents eviction.

Newfield, Marcia. A Book for Jodan. New York: Atheneum, 1975. (6-10)
Jodan and her father express love cross-country by creating scrapbooks.

Pinkwater, Manus. Wingman. New York: Dodd Mead, 1975. (7-10)
Donald, the only Chinese boy in his class, feels alienated when his mother is hospitalized and his worth is not recognized.

Rogers, Helen. Morris and His Brave Lion. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975. (4-9)
The aftermath of divorce is explored in a unique plot.

Sharmat, Marjorie. I Want Mama. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. (4-8)
Mother goes to the hospital for an operation.

Sitea, Linda. "Zachary's Divorce." pp. 124-127 in Free to Be ... You and Me. See Hart, above.
Zachary wakes to find his father gone.

Smith, Grace, comp. The Hospital Is Where ... Manhattan Beach, California: The Hospital Is Where..., 1416 Ocean Drive, 1975. (4-10)
The writings and drawings of children who are hospitalized.

Sonneborn, Ruth. Friday Night Is Papa Night. New York: Viking, 1970. (4-8)
Pedro's father returns home only on weekends, separated by employment elsewhere.

Stein, Sarah. About Dying. New York: Walker, 1974. (4-8)
Dual narratives (one for adults, one for children) explain death.

Steptoe, John. Stevie. New York: Harper and Row, 1969. (4-8)
Stevie's stay with Robert's mother while his own mother works is greeted with disgust --- until Stevie leaves.

Viorst, Judith. The Tenth Good Thing About Barney. New York:

Atheneum, 1971. (4-8)
Barney the cat has died and his owner gives him a eulogy.

Waber, Bernard. Ira Sleeps Over. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972. (3-7)
Ira worries about taking his teddy bear along on nis first night sleeping at a neighbor's.

Zolotow, Charlotte. A Father Like That. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. (4-8)
Fantasies about the ideal father in the absence of any father at all.

Zolotow, Charlotte. My Grandson Lew. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. (4-8)
Not told of his grandfather's death, Lew and his mother mourn together four years after the event.